

# American air travelers are one step closer to more leg room

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In a [memo](#), the watchdog for the U.S. Department of Transportation has revealed that it's auditing the FAA's oversight of aircraft evacuation procedures this month.

The move from the DOT's Inspector General comes at the request of Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn., who has been pushing for both [evacuation testing and less cramped airline seating for years](#).

All aircraft must be able to evacuate in less than 90 seconds in the event of an emergency, and it's up to the FAA to certify them using data from real-world tests or equivalent simulations.

But Cohen and others like Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) have long warned that shrinking and more densely packed airline seats mean the old tests need to be updated with modern plane configurations.

"I don't want to see a day when there's a plane crash and the National Transportation Safety Board ascertains that the plane couldn't be evacuated in the proper time and people lost their lives from smoke inhalation of fire," Cohen told Yahoo Finance in 2017.

In addition to shrinking seat pitch — the distance between seats — the Inspector General's office also noted that modern passengers rely far more now on carry-on luggage. Despite these changes, the IG's office wrote, the standards have not changed significantly since 1990.



Source: Pxhere

In July 2017, FAA Associate Administrator Ali Bahrami and John DeLisi of the Office of Aviation Safety at the National Transportation Safety Board promised Cohen the FAA would evaluate evacuation procedures. As they had not done so yet almost a year later, Cohen asked the Inspector General's office for an audit.

Cohen had long pushed a bill he called the SEAT Act — Safe Egress in Air Travel — to make sure that modern airplanes could be evacuated safely and potentially pass minimum seat size requirements. The bill [passed the House](#) as a part of the FAA Reauthorization act, but has not cleared the Senate yet.

## **An American Airlines evacuation was too slow**

A memo from the Inspector General's office echoed Cohen's concerns that stemmed from an American Airlines flight from October 2016 that evacuated in two minutes and 21 seconds following an engine fire, significantly slower than the FAA's required 90 seconds.

While it's possible that Cohen's and Kinzinger's theory that cramped seating actually isn't the cause of longer evacuation times — though it probably is — the lack of testing various configurations of seating leaves the question hanging.

Either travelers have been flying on planes deemed unsafe by FAA evacuation standards and deserve more legroom, or they're safe now and don't need any changes from the cramped status quo.

The Inspector General's office will be examining whether the FAA's standards can "safely evacuate aircraft in emergencies within the required 90 seconds given these changes in the airline industry and consumer behavior," according to the memo. The office will also assess how the FAA takes passenger behavior, demographics, and seating capacity into account, and also how it determines whether current aircraft layouts are up to code.

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